

Joseph F Trimble 09/05/2008 07:41:11 AM From DB/Inbox: Joseph F Trimble

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Text:

UNCLAS SENSITIVE NAIROBI 02032
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ACTION: POL

INFO: AID-UNCL AID RSO REF RA DCM DAO CONS AMB FBI
DHS PAS KSLO ECON

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MRANNEBERGER
DRAFTED: POL:JDAVISBA
CLEARED: POL:JTRIMBLE DAO:SGRUBBS RA:TBETONI

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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6876
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 0375
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UNCLAS NAIROBI 002032

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Somalia - Clan Militias Battle to Control Kismayo

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On August 22, a loose coalition of clan militias, cooperating with remnants of the former Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and some al-Shabaab elements drove warlord and Member of Parliament Barre "Hirale" out of Kismayo, southern Somalia's major port city. Upwards of 100 fighters and civilians may have been killed, and 300 wounded in three days of intense fighting. Contrary to media reports that al-Shabaab has taken control of the city, the coalition is mainly driven by sub-clan interests. Reports Hirale represented the Transitional Federal Government are exaggerated. This most recent battle is the latest chapter of Kismayo's ongoing saga of violent sub-clan rivalry. With its strategic location and its agricultural wealth, opportunistic armed groups have long sought to control the port and its environs, but it is unclear who will gain a long-term victory. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On August 22, a local Darood/Ogadeni clan militia, leading a loose coalition of minor Darood militias, former Union of Islamic Courts fighters and some al-Shabaab, ousted rival warlord Barre Hirale's Darood/Marehan militia from Kismayo, an important port city in Somalia's southern Juba region. Rival militias and Islamists banded together expressly to defeat Hirale and his Marehan allies, who were resented for the lawlessness and insecurity that marked their 13 months in control of Kismayo. Undoubtedly, the fighting was also about control of Kismayo's air and sea ports, a major source of revenue. Reports vary, but upwards of 100 fighters and civilians may have been killed, and 300 wounded in the fighting, a significant number of casualties even by Somalia's standards.

¶3. (SBU) Hirale, a longtime fixture of Juba politics, is a member of parliament and was Transitional Federal Government (TFG) defense minister before the ICU came to power in late 2006. Although he claimed to represent the TFG in Kismayo, in fact he had violently overthrown a TFG-appointed rival in July 2007, and had only

superficial links to the TFG. Hirale has reportedly fled with his militia to the Gedo region, where he may be gathering strength for a counter-attack. One of our contacts told us that Hirale contacted TFG leaders for help, and is requesting Ethiopian troops rush to Kismayo to help him dislodge al-Shabaab and other militia commanders that are still in the area.

¶4. (SBU) Reminiscent of their rise to power in 2006, newly-arrived Islamists promised to bring order to the city. However, this new coalition is not directly linked to former ICU leader and Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia Chairman Sheikh Sherif, who has denied that his fighters were involved in the battle in Kismayo. Al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Robow and Hassan "al-Turki" Abdullah Hersi are reportedly in Kismayo, and made public appearances in the city as the fighting wound down. Al-Turki allegedly told Kismayo elders that he came to "liberate" them from an oppressive militia and remove roadblocks and other impediments to the city's normal functioning. Islamists emphasized that Kismayo's residents are free to form their own administration.

¶5. (SBU) Kismayo has been the locus of a long-standing conflict between the region's Darood sub-clans. The city has changed hands several times in the recent past and some have estimated that it has been controlled by 30 different regimes (mostly clan-based) since 1991. The Darood/Ogadeni, last week's winners, have a power base outside Kismayo, and are unlikely to be welcome for the long term by Kismayo's citizenry, the majority of whom are Darood/Marehan. Our contacts question how long this Kismayo coalition of convenience between local clans, ICU remnants, and al-Shabaab can hold together, given the city's past, its clan makeup, and likelihood of disagreements over sharing power and port revenues.

¶6. (SBU) Embassy contacts tell us victorious Darood clan leaders are wary of the Islamists' presence. After a convincing win against Hirale, they least want to submit to another armed force. We've heard Darood clansmen close to President Yusuf, have approached their fellow clansmen in Kismayo about closer cooperation with the TFG and endorsement of the Djibouti process. However, should the various leaders who are now claiming victory in Kismayo choose to establish closer ties to the Islamists, al-Shabaab may gain a stronger foothold and strategic assets in a region where they are gaining influence. The dust is still settling and neither the immediate nor long-term outcomes in Kismayo are certain.

RANNEBERGER